

Executive Summary

1.1 What Prompted the Study?

The cities of Coeur d'Alene and Hayden have grown considerably in the last 20 years, most notably within the US 95 corridor north of Harrison Street. Much of Coeur d'Alene's commercial and business growth has shifted to the US 95 corridor because of the highway's accessibility, proximity to growing residential areas, and availability of affordable and developable land. The corridor's attractiveness has resulted in traffic volumes on US 95 that regularly exceed the highway's optimum carrying capacity. Balancing the mobility and access needs within the US 95 corridor has become an increasingly difficult task. In recent years, local media, community leaders, government officials and the public have expressed growing concern and dissatisfaction with the present system of traffic signals through the corridor.

In anticipation of further growth in the corridor, the Idaho Transportation Department, local jurisdictions, and key stakeholders together, initiated the US 95 Coeur d'Alene Corridor Plan in the summer of 2000. Many in the community are interested in knowing if a Huetter Alternate Route would be needed and when. The study looked at US 95 from Mica Creek at approximate Milepost (MP) 421, to Ohio Match Road at approximate MP 441.

The major goals of the study included: (1) linking land use and transportation planning; (2) fostering interagency coordination; and, (3) identifying options for corridor improvements and management. The study process integrated a public involvement program with the various plan-development steps:

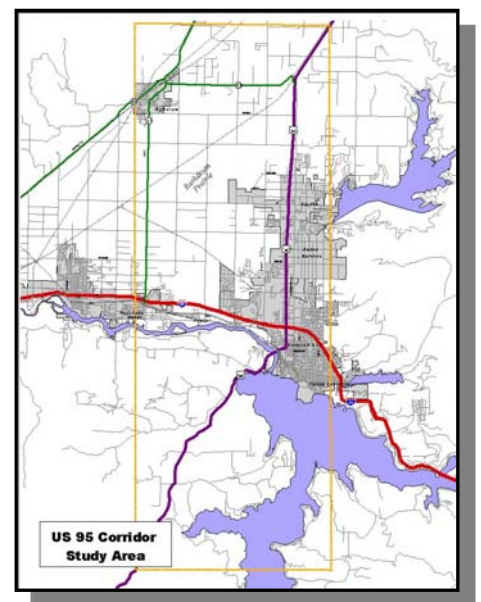
- Identification of issues, and environmental and land use constraints;
- Examination of the impacts of growth; and
- Definition and testing of various transportation options.

1.2 Existing Traffic Conditions are Complex

Congress has designated US 95 as a high priority route. Within Idaho, US 95 is classified as a principal arterial, and is the only statewide, north-south highway that links the Idaho Panhandle to the rest of the state. Within the Coeur d'Alene/Hayden area, US 95 serves a variety of travel needs, and the form and function of the highway varies significantly within the study limits, as does the surrounding land use. Originally, US 95 was constructed as an intercity connector, but the highway has also evolved to serve as a local arterial for the communities of Coeur d'Alene, Hayden, and Dalton Gardens.

The existing US 95 highway configuration and functionality varies greatly within the study area. South of the Spokane River, US 95 is a two-lane highway with a number of horizontal and vertical curves, steep grades (e.g., Mica Hill), and limited local road access. The existing bridge over the Spokane River is narrow, with room for only a single bike lane on one side.

Just north of the Spokane River, US 95 crosses over the Burlington Northern RR (serving a local saw mill) and Northwest Boulevard (Business I-90), with directional ramp access to Northwest Boulevard.

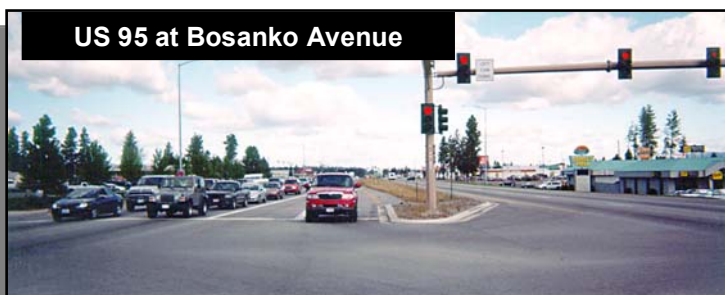


The US 95/Lincoln Avenue/Walnut Avenue intersection is quite unconventional, and has been the subject of a number of possible improvements. From Walnut Avenue to Ironwood Drive, US 95 transitions to a four-lane urban arterial with local street and private driveway accesses located in close proximity along US 95. Many of the adjacent medical office and commercial buildings along US 95 in this section are abutting the sidewalks that parallel US 95. The State does not own additional right-of-way here that could allow for easy widening or expansion of US 95.



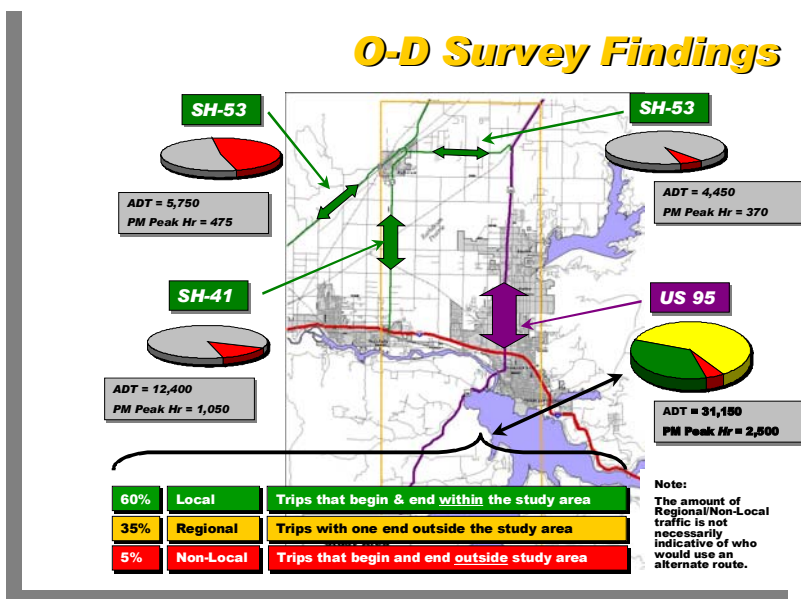
US 95 crosses over I-90 with a full access interchange in the section between Ironwood Drive and Appleway Avenue. Local access in this section is restricted. The major intersections at Ironwood Drive, each of the I-90 ramps and Appleway Avenue are all signalized, with lane configurations striped to best meet the current demand. There are no pedestrian and bicycle facilities along US 95 in this section.

US 95 is a divided, four-lane highway north of Appleway Avenue to Hayden. In the last five to ten years, this section of US 95 has seen considerable change with a growing number of business and commercial enterprises locating within the corridor. The state owns sufficient right of way in this section, which provides flexibility to make significant improvements.



US 95 transitions back to a two-lane highway north of Hayden, and continues as a two lane route to the northern study limit at Ohio Match Road. ITD has short-term plans to widen this portion of US 95 to four travel lanes.

Traffic conditions vary throughout the corridor. South of the Spokane River, the traffic volume on US 95 ranges from about 5,000 to 8,000 vehicles per day. Between Northwest Boulevard and Ironwood Drive, the volume on US 95 increases to about 24,000 vehicles per day. In and around the I-90 interchange traffic on US 95 often exceeds 32,000 vehicles per day.



As traffic volume increases so does congestion. Today, many of the sections of US 95 from about Walnut Avenue north to Kathleen Avenue experience traffic demand in the afternoon peak hour that either approaches or exceeds the functional capacity of US 95 and the major cross-streets. Congestion on US 95 not only results in delays for highway users, but also significantly affects those traveling on the local street system. The impact of congestion to city and county roads is especially severe at major intersections with US 95 such as Ironwood, Appleway, Kathleen and others, where stacking of vehicles occurs regularly. At some locations under heavy volumes, vehicles in long queues on side streets may need multiple signal cycles in order to advance through the intersection.

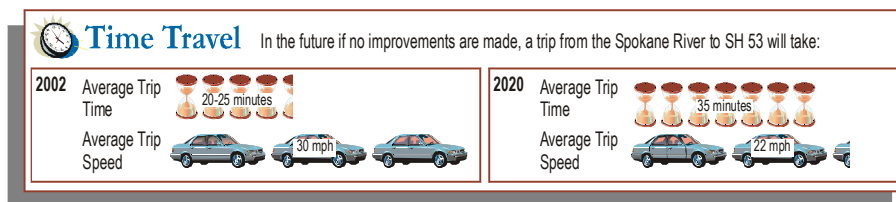
Two separate traffic surveys were conducted on US 95 and other state highways in the study area to identify, in general, who travels the US 95 corridor during the afternoon and evening peak periods. The surveys showed that about 5 to 8 percent of the traffic on US 95 is non-stop through the study area; another 35 percent has one trip-end outside the study area; and the remaining 58 to 60 percent of the traffic both begins and ends locally within the study area.

Origin-destination information shows the highway's importance not only to local traffic, but also to our region's mobility. Heavy use of US 95 by local traffic which both begins and ends within the study area indicates that local users find US 95 the fastest route to many destinations within the study area, even though most adjacent developments do not have direct driveway access to the highway. The large share of the traffic on US 95 which involves regional and through trips that begin or end outside of the study area also supports US 95's importance to regional mobility. At present, US 95 is the only route in Kootenai County that serves mobility from south of the Spokane River to north of Hayden.

1.3 The Affects of Future Growth on US 95

The Cities of Coeur d'Alene and Hayden, and Kootenai County all have developed Comprehensive Plans to guide future land use and infrastructure development within the study area. A demographic forecast for Kootenai County was performed as part of the corridor study, and the Region's 2020 population, housing, and employment forecasts were incorporated in an update of the Kootenai County Travel Demand Model.

By 2020, both jobs and residential housing units in Kootenai County are expected to increase by more than 70 percent. These forecasts were used to estimate the future traffic volumes on US 95 and other collector and arterial streets within the study area. The forecasts showed that the level of *traffic congestion will more than double* on many sections of US 95 within the next 20 years if no major transportation improvements are built. For example, today it takes about 20 to 25 minutes to drive US 95 from the Spokane River to SH-53 in the evening peak hour, at about an average speed of about 30 miles per hour (mph). By 2020, the same trip will take almost 35 minutes at an average speed of about 22 mph. Again, severe congestion on US 95 will carry over to the local side streets, eventually affecting other local collectors and arterials.



1.4 Community Involvement Was Crucial to the US 95 Planning

Public participation in the planning process was crucial in gaining valuable insight into potential improvement options for US 95. The highway serves many constituents who oftentimes have conflicting needs. To reach the broadest constituency, the US 95 public involvement program included a number of advisory groups and public outreach opportunities. Three separate advisory groups were formed to help guide the planning process:

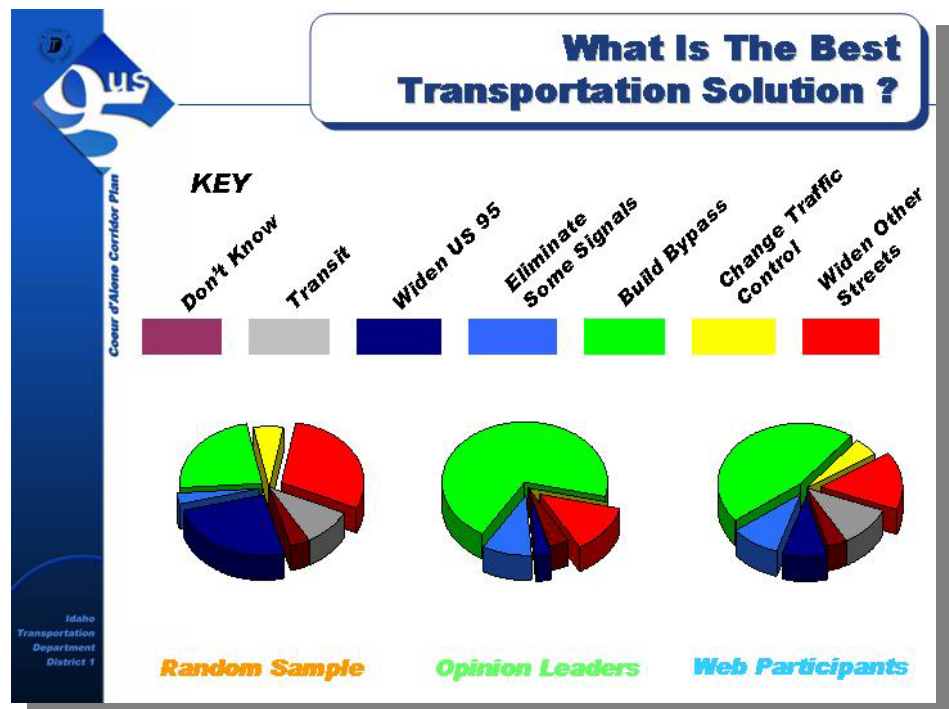
- The **Technical Advisory Group**, consisting of city, county, highway district and state agency staff with additional representation from school districts and emergency services;
- The **Community Task Force**, consisting of study area land owners, residents, business owners, transit providers, bicycle/pedestrian interests, and other active members of the community; and
- The **Joint Board**, consisting of local, regional, state, and U.S. elected officials.

Study participants voiced their concerns and identified a number of issues including:

- Traffic congestion and highway capacity;
- Stopping at traffic signals;
- Traffic back-ups on local streets;
- Delay
- Travel times;
- Traffic safety; and
- Better accommodation for bikes and pedestrians.

Project oversight was provided by the **Project Team**, which consisted of ITD and Consultant staff.

A series of five public open house meetings were held during the course of the study, at which more than 300 citizens participated. The project also included an interactive project website which reached more than 200 participants, and three separate public opinion research exercises which engaged more than 500 local citizens. The public outreach effort helped to confirm existing corridor problems, assisted the project team in developing a full range of solutions, and provided critical feedback to guide the team in narrowing the wide range of solutions into a meaningful set of plan findings and an implementation strategy for on-going environmental study and engineering analysis.



1.5 Community Goals for the Future of US 95

Through community outreach and public opinion research activities, these goals were identified for the future of US 95:

- Balance the need for mobility, safety, and access;
- Ensure the future performance and service level of US 95 as an urban, Principal Arterial;
- Design and manage the corridor to optimize safety and minimize congestion for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Preserve the role of the US 95 facility as an intercity connector; and
- Help preserve the integrity of communities served by US 95 in Kootenai County.

1.6 A Wide Range of Options Were Studied

The project team and study participants identified and evaluated a full range of future transportation improvement options for US 95. The major options included:

- Improve local arterials;
- Widen US 95 for more travel lanes;
- Construct a new, alternate route, generally in the Huetter Road area;
- Reconstruct the US 95 route as an expressway; and
- Apply land use and traffic management techniques.

The technical performance of the draft improvement options was assessed by the Project Team, and presented to the study participants thorough a series of Advisory Group exercises, Public Open House meetings and Public Opinion Research activities. A set of special focus group meetings were held with landowners, business owners, and local interest groups to fully discuss and identify the issues and options to improve US 95 in each of the unique segments of the US 95 study area. Following these meetings, the project team developed several Draft Solution Packages that defined potential long-range, corridor-wide solutions, including planning-level cost estimates for each option. Draft solution Packages were then further discussed and evaluated, and refined through the public outreach process.

1.7 Community Reaction to Options

Within the community, considerable controversy arose late in the study process concerning the location of a future north-south high-speed mobility corridor.

Of the options examined during the study, two basic concepts came to the forefront as potential long-term mobility options north of I-90: An existing route expressway, and/or an alternate route. Each concept has both proponents and opponents, however, the majority of controversy during the final advisory group meeting and public open house centered around the future expressway option on the existing alignment.

Deep concern was expressed by property owners adjacent to US 95 that reconstruction of the existing route to allow high speed travel could cause excessive impacts to commercial land uses adjacent to US 95. Based on the passionate nature of the comments received from business owners during the last part of the study process, it is clear that many businesses feel threatened by impacts which have not yet been fully identified. A perception that loss of visibility or reduced accessibility to commercial properties



might occur led the business group to lobby strongly against any change to the existing signalized configuration beyond the simple addition of travel lanes.

In the future, capacity improvements under the existing signalized configuration will need to be fully explored along with major options for enhanced mobility such as an expressway or alternate route. Existing signals on US 95 today are not spaced for optimum mobility. In order to maintain mobility on the existing route with a signalized system, relocation of several existing signals, and significant local street improvements may be necessary.

1.8 Identified Needs

The Study examined current and future traffic conditions in the US 95 corridor. With the input from Study participants the Project Team helped identify and summarize the short- and long-term needs in the US 95 corridor. In the Ohio Match/Garwood segment there are short-term needs to manage access and improve traffic safety conditions, and widen US 95 to four travel lanes to meet traffic demand. Any future improvements also need to provide adequate access to adjacent land uses.

Traffic safety measures and traffic control enhancements are needed within the Coeur d'Alene segment to meet current demand. Local arterial street widenings and circulation improvements are also needed to support the US 95 corridor. To meet the future growth in traffic, the region will need an access-controlled north-south highway capable of 55 mile per hour traffic conditions. Meanwhile, the preservation and acquisition of key rights-of-way will be needed, so as not to limit future improvement options. Also, careful management of access and signal spacing in the Coeur d'Alene/Hayden area will be crucial to mitigating congestion on US 95 and local cross streets until a long-term solution can be implemented.

In the Ironwood segment there are needs for traffic safety and control enhancements to meet current mobility needs. This segment also needs local arterial street capacity improvements to relieve Ironwood Drive and US 95 traffic congestion.

The Spokane River Bridge segment will need both additional travel lanes but also separate bicycle and pedestrian facilities to meet the region's access, circulation and capacity needs. Short-term traffic signing and safety enhancements are needed in the Blackwell Island area. The Mica/Cougar Creek segment is in need of added capacity (additional travel lanes) and traffic control to improve highway operations and safety.

Throughout the Coeur d'Alene Corridor Study process, our advisory groups and the community have engaged in considerable discussion of issues facing the US 95 in the future. A dilemma has arisen concerning how to best direct project funding on US 95 over the next 20 years. At the heart of the community's dilemma is the realization that US 95 serves many different types of "customers", and that often the interests of these customers can be at odds.

For example, businesses in the corridor enjoy valuable benefits associated with their proximity to US 95, such as good visibility and accessibility to many thousands of daily travelers. To many business interests, perpetuation of the existing signals, the addition of new signals, additional direct highway access points and even reduced speed limits on US 95 may be appealing. In contrast, US 95 also serves many commuters, who would appreciate fewer signals and higher operating speeds as they use US 95 every day. Achieving consensus where extreme philosophical differences exist will take some time. Today, a healthy dialogue continues within the community concerning the best approach for dealing with US 95 as growth continues.

It is important that the community be allowed the time needed to work toward a philosophical consensus. Lack of consensus on a locally preferred master plan for the corridor makes concluding the study a

challenging endeavor, however the significant achievements that the community has made over the last two years should be acknowledged.

The selection of any "preferred alternative" requires a full federal environmental evaluation which is beyond the scope of this study. The identified needs and improvement options developed in this study will provide the foundation for later project selection.

These needs have been identified by ITD and the community:

1. **Regional North-South Mobility Corridor.** A future north-south freeway facility to accommodate high speed traffic is needed. However, the ultimate location of such a facility is bitterly contested among community members. This decision will need to be deferred until a federal environmental evaluation can be undertaken, when adequate design detail is finally available to identify socio-economic impacts.
2. **Eventual Relief Route.** Additional highway capacity, beyond what is possible on the existing alignment, will someday be needed. It may be possible to accommodate the next 20 years' worth of traffic growth within the existing highway corridor, however beyond the 20-year planning horizon, the need for an alternate relief route is likely.
3. **Better Local Mobility on Existing Route.** Congestion, stopping and waiting caused by signals, back-up on local streets, and travel time top the list of the community concerns for US 95 today. Technical analysis shows that we are already experiencing poor levels of service during peak times. Future growth will exacerbate operational problems to an intolerable level on both US 95 and local cross streets if mobility is not improved. Even if an alternate route is built, it will be important to preserve capacity and mobility on the existing route.
4. **Preservation of Key Rights of Way.** There is a need to preserve and acquire right of way in key locations, so as not to limit our options in the future. Along Lincoln Way, right of way should be acquired to allow for highway expansion. The Huetter corridor north of I-90 also needs a presentation strategy so that development on the prairie doesn't preclude a future relief route.
5. **Improved Existing Route Safety.** Nearly every signalized intersection within the study area is on the High Accident Location (HAL) list. Community members have voiced concerns not only for improved automobile safety, but also for safer pedestrian accommodation along and across US 95. Even where HALs do not exist, there are perceived safety problems corridor wide.
6. **Additional Local Arterial Capacity.** There is unanimous agreement within the community that improvements to the local arterial routes are needed regardless of what happens on US 95. Adding capacity to local arterial routes will reduce local dependence on US 95 and help mitigate highway congestion by providing people with other ways to get around town.
7. **Access Management.** Preservation of existing highway access points within the urban area is a concern voiced by local businesses and property owners. At the same time, signal spacing and median treatments need to meet ITD's access management policy in order to stave off severe congestion on the existing route as long as possible. In the rural portions of the corridor, study participants have expressed willingness to work with ITD's access management policy to enhance safety at highway approaches.
8. **Better Pedestrian and Bicycle Accommodation.** Better overall connectivity of pedestrian and bicycle facilities in and around the study area is needed.



In addition to the highway needs identified above, study participants have expressed a desire to preserve and enhance existing aesthetic and environmental resources in the corridor, especially in areas south of the Spokane River. The community's environmental values are important criteria that will receive careful consideration as improvement options are further developed for US 95.

Options to address the above needs were examined and are documented in this study for future use. Selection of a preferred alternative for US 95 can only be made within the federal environmental process.

1.9 Next Steps

The study provides a road map for future transportation and land use planning, however, building community consensus will be an important element in moving forward with the knowledge and information we have gathered through this study. But the study also points out there is no “silver bullet” solution that will address every issue and concern. Community consensus will be a key building block in developing an overall long-range plan for US 95 through the Coeur d'Alene/Hayden area.

A federal environmental evaluation and engineering analysis is needed before any major highway construction projects can begin. The selection and construction of any option would take several years, and there will be significant opportunity for local public input, including business and local community leaders and elected officials. It is likely that there will a number of public meetings held to guide the selection of a final solution.